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**DeNUCCI SAYS DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
IMPLEMENTS FOSTER CARE TRACKING IMPROVEMENTS**

State Auditor Joe DeNucci reported today that the Department of Social Services (DSS) has strengthened its protections of foster children by completing corrective action that DeNucci recommended in a series of prior audits.

DeNucci's latest audit found no reports of overdue Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks of foster care providers at the end of fiscal 2007. In a 2005 report, DeNucci had found that 133 providers had overdue or blank CORI records, a number that was reduced to 68 in 2006. DSS also improved its foster and contracted care service monitoring, including CORI compliance, by shifting oversight of its contracted foster care homes to its Central Office Foster to its Central Office Foster Care Support Services Unit.

Past DeNucci audits had found problems with children being placed in homes before licensing was completed. DeNucci reported that DSS has taken steps to resolve that by distributing monthly home licensing compliance reports to regional and area office staff. The Central Office staff also continued its monitoring of unlicensed foster homes that exceed the 40-day limit allowed by regulation, ensuring due diligence.

Other DSS improvements included:

- Significant enhancements to FamilyNet, the agency's computerized foster care tracking system, making it easier for staff members to use.
- The addition of six Regional Clinic Directors to assist field staff in overseeing and improving clinical practice.
- Creation of a Family Resource Policy that reviews standards and expectations concerning timeframes for task completion at foster homes.
- Complying with state law by reducing a backlog of appeals hearings by hiring an additional hearings officer with plans to add a third.

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“The Department of Social Services has responded very positively to my recommendations to help improve one of state government’s most important responsibilities – to protect young and vulnerable children,” said DeNucci. “Many of the agency’s problems resulted from staff reductions. I am pleased with the corrective action that DSS has implemented through the additional resources it has received.”